

Macomb Co. to tweak jury duty

4 days of service seen as hardship

By JOHN MASSON
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

There's the lucrative pay — \$25 per day for the first day; \$40 for subsequent days. There's the generous reimbursement of 10 cents for each mile driven for the cause. And there's the mental stimulation of shifting uncomfortably in a chair while waiting to be called.

It's hard to say exactly why some Macomb County residents are less than ecstatic when that pink summons for a week's worth of jury duty lands in their mailbox. But whatever the reason, Macomb County Clerk Carmella Sabaugh aims to alleviate it with the introduction of a "one day/one trial" system of jury duty in its place.

The first summonses for the system, approved recently for a test run in November and December, were mailed Wednesday. The change isn't expected to cost taxpayers any money, and could help make doing one's civic duty a more enjoyable experience.

If it sticks in Macomb, the plan would bring the county in line with Wayne, Oakland and Washtenaw counties, Sabaugh said.

"It's going to be so great for the public," Sabaugh said. "If you're summoned for jury duty now, you have to come in for four days, and that's a real

hardship on a lot of people."

Under the new system, Sabaugh said, "we'll summon like 150 jurors, say on Tuesday, and whoever isn't called for a trial, then they don't have to come back. The next day, we'll bring more people in."

Trials don't begin on Mondays.

If all goes as expected with the test program — which was approved by the circuit court judges — Sabaugh expects it to become permanent in January.

And that sounded good to 25-year-old Steve Arant of Fraser, who was enjoying some fading fall sunshine on a jury duty lunch break Wednesday.

"I don't mind serving the community," said Arant, waiting uncomplainingly through Day Two of his stint. "But a day would be a whole lot better than a whole week. I'd rather go to work than just sit on my butt all day."

In 2004, nearly 13,000 people were summoned for jury duty in Macomb County, with about 7,200 people actually called in to the courthouse, according to a tally by Sabaugh's office. The prospective jurors' names were culled from Secretary of State lists of driver's licenses and Michigan ID cards.

Of that number, only 1,663 served on 147 circuit court jury trials, which lasted an average of 3.4 days for criminal trials and 3.1 days for civil cases.

Contact JOHN MASSON at 586-469-4904 or masson@freepress.com.